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ABSTRACT

This document presents a teaching package designed to introduce students in grades one through five to Chinese painting methods and equipment. Prepared in conjunction with an exhibition of paintings by child prodigy Wang Yani titled "The Brush of Innocence," the package consists of a teacher's activity plan unit, a slide set of art works by Wang Yani, an activity book for children, and a teacher evaluation form. The package is organized into five sections: (1) an introduction to the artist Wang Yani; (2) slides and discussion material about Wang Yani's paintings and the four treasures of the Chinese artist's studio (the inkstand, the inkstone, brush, and paper); (3) activities of students; (4) background information about Chinese painting for teachers; and (5) a list of places that sell Chinese painting materials. All but one of the slides presents works by Wang Yani who painted them between the ages of five and eleven years old. Classroom activities are organized into two sections: the four treasures of the scholar's studio; and painting and poetry. A variety of accessories common to the scholar's table also are described: water droppers, inkstick stands, paperweights, brush rests, brush washers, and chops that are carved name seals. Art activities for students include writing with a Chinese brush, identifying a student's four treasures, discussion and activities about the three major genres of Chinese painting, making a clay mountain brush rest, making a personal seal, and designing a handscroll. (KM)

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Yani
The brush of innocence

Teacher's Activity Packet

Grades One through Five

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TEACHER'S PACKET

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We would like to thank Toni Bickart, Roca Harding and Jennifer Voorhees for their help in preparing the material in this packet.

Introduction for Teachers

This packet is designed to introduce students in grades one through five to the materials used in Chinese painting and to Chinese painting itself. The primary materials used in China for painting and calligraphy--the brush, inkstick, inkstone, and paper--are given great respect and are referred to as the "Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio." While Chinese painting and calligraphy traditionally have been arts practiced by scholars educated in the Chinese classics, brush and ink were also the common writing implements used in China until the twentieth century. In one style of Chinese painting called "idea writing" (xieyi in Chinese), an artist composes the painting without preparatory sketches or drawing, letting thoughts pour out freely and spontaneously. Wang Yani, a young artist from Guangxi Province, while not formally trained in idea writing, is a spontaneous painter whose work can be classified in this style.

The slides in this packet feature paintings by Wang Yani. Yani, who was born in 1975, mostly uses the traditional tools of a Chinese artist, and she has clearly absorbed some influences from traditional Chinese art. Still, Wang Yani expresses her own wit, imagination, and vision in a fresh style.

The enclosed materials have been designed so you may choose the activities that best match your classroom situation. They are organized in the following manner.

1. An introduction to the artist Wang Yani.

In this section students will explore the creative process that Wang Yani uses in her art and will discuss how her interest in the world around her is reflected in her paintings.

2. **Slides of Wang Yani's paintings and of the Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio.**

The slides, which are accompanied by discussion questions, will illustrate Wang Yani's creativity and her use of brush, ink, and color in her paintings. Students will learn that a Chinese painting usually includes the artist's signature and name seal, and sometimes an artist will write a title or a short passage on the work to complement the painting.

3. **Activities for students.**

In this section students will: learn about the Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio; discover how to use a Chinese brush and ink; make their own brush rest; design their own name seal; and create their own Chinese painting. Activities are arranged so they can be done by students of different ages, individually or in groups.

4. **Background information for teachers.**

5. **A list of places in the Washington metropolitan area that sell Chinese painting materials.**

The packet also contains an envelope of paper samples and a poster, which is a detail from Wang Yani's handscroll <u>One Hundred Monkeys</u>.

Chinese painting and calligraphy are sophisticated art forms. Those who practice and study them spend their lives perfecting their knowledge. Our aim in this packet is to give a brief and rather sketchy overview of these arts. Understanding the tools used in Chinese painting and calligraphy is vital to understanding the art. By introducing your students to these tools we hope to start them on an exploration of what, why, and how Chinese painters paint. There are many styles of Chinese painting, each with its own history and philosophy.

Background Information for Teachers

I. THE FOUR TREASURES OF A SCHOLAR'S STUDIO

The Chinese have long referred to the inkstick, inkstone, brush, and paper as the "Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio." Scholars, calligraphers, and painters regarded them as indispensable tools for their work. (While some women painted and wrote poetry prior to the twentieth century, these activities were more commonly male pursuits.) The high quality of the Four Treasures was of the utmost importance, for who would want to use a brush that dropped hairs or paper that did not properly absorb ink?

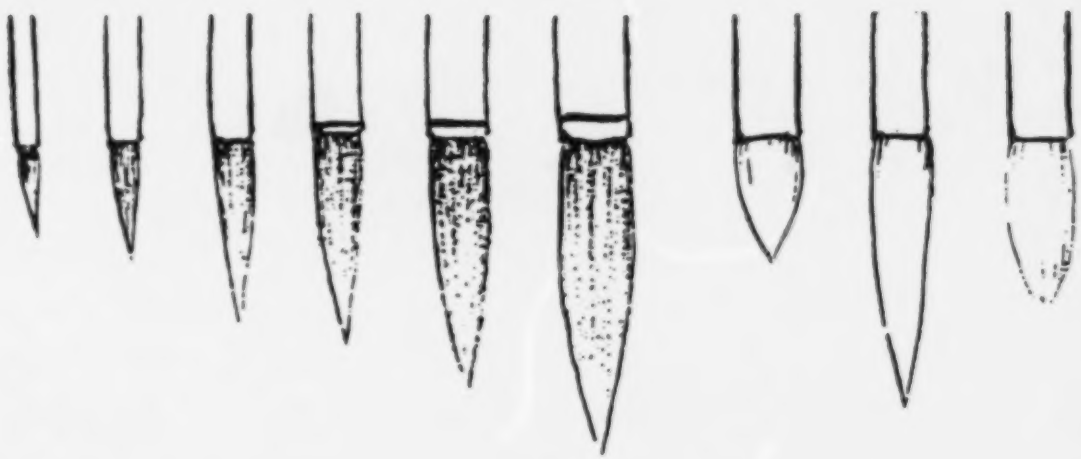
The Brush

The Chinese brush is constructed differently from a Western one. The hairs in a Western brush fit into a metal clamp, or ferrule, which holds them in place. The hairs of a Chinese brush are held together with adhesive and are inserted into a hollow bamboo tube. Bamboo is a common, inexpensive material, but the brush handle can also be made of more precious substances, such as ivory, bone, jade, porcelain, or cloisonne. The Chinese brush is composed of three major sections. The innermost section is a long core of hair; surrounding this core, the middle section is made up of layers of shorter hair; the outer section is one or more layers of hair that reaches from base to tip, swelling

around the shorter hairs of the middle section and coming to a point. The space between the inner and outermost layers, created by the shorter hair of the middle section, acts as a reservoir where water-based ink or pigments naturally accumulate. To make Chinese brushes, hairs and bristles from throughout the animal kingdom are used: rabbit, badger, weasel, hare, wolf, deer, horse, goat, pig, and sheep.

Resilient, soft, and coarse comprise the three main categories of brushes. A resilient brush can be used to draw a fine, delicate line. Resilient brushes are often made of light brown weasel hair. Soft brushes, often made of rabbit, goat, or sheep hair, produce a soft effect. Coarse brushes made of horse hair can cause ragged effects and bold strokes. The sizes of the brushes range from tiny (as small as 1/8" in diameter), for very fine line work, to huge (more than four inches in diameter), for painting on a large scale.

The Chinese scholar needed to have a thorough knowledge of the different types and sizes of brushes as well as the visual effects they produced with ink on paper.



The Inkstick and Inkstone

The deep, glossy ink used for Chinese calligraphy and painting is made by rubbing or grinding a solid inkstick or cake with water on a hard surface. The Chinese inkstick is made by capturing the carbon produced by burning pine. This sooty carbon is collected, mixed with a solution of animal glue, pressed into molds, and dried. Inksticks are often molded into rectangular or round shapes, and they may be decorated with designs of dragons, landscapes, auspicious beings, and gilded inscriptions.

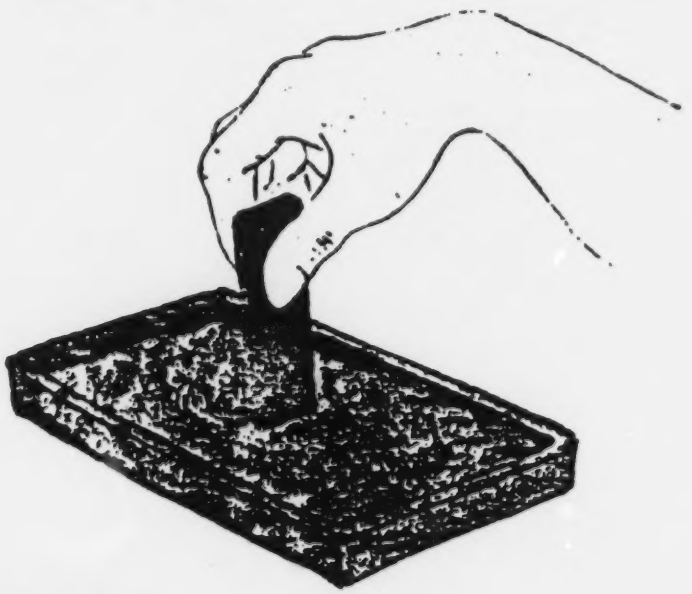
Ink is not prepared in advance but just before the artist begins to paint. The inkstick is rubbed on an inkstone, which is a fine-grained slab of stone with a raised flat area for rubbing and a depressed reservoir for ink. This ink flows freely from the brush and makes possible the extended brush movements and fluidity that is so pronounced in some styles of Chinese painting. The quantity of water used, which affects the consistency and shade of the ink, is important and requires judgment and experience.

Chinese scholars wrote extensively about the quality of the ink used, its wet or dry attributes, and its expressive possibilities. It was said that Ni Can, a famous fourteenth-century scholar-painter who painted sparse landscapes with very dry ink brushtrokes, was "as economical of ink as if it were gold." Writing about Wu Zhen, who also lived in the fourteenth century, the seventeenth-century painter Wu Li wrote that Wu

Zhen's "brushwork was pure and strong, original and rich, always full of variation."

Why do many Chinese artists emphasize monochrome ink, almost to the exclusion of color in their painting? Not all Chinese painters, of course, prefer to use ink without color, but Chinese scholars typically prized the expressive qualities of calligraphic brushwork created with ink alone. Therefore, many scholars eschewed the instant appeal of colorful paintings, such as those produced by court painters or professional artists.

Many scholar-artists were more concerned with line, shape, space, and the qualities of dark and light than with color. They preferred to work within the limited range of monochrome ink, using perhaps just a touch of color. In the history of Chinese painting, literati painters emphasized monochrome ink and calligraphic brushwork, which is quite gestural. Professional painters used a great deal more color, often with precise lines that could be as thin as wire.



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Paper

Although the paper used for Chinese painting and calligraphy is usually called "rice paper," few types of paper are actually made of rice straw, and these are considered much inferior in quality. A more accurate term is plant-fiber paper, since most papers are made from a combination of reeds, hemp, mulberry, bamboo, grass, and occasionally cotton.

Paper for painting can be white, cream, or buff. It comes in various thicknesses and qualities and goes through a process called sizing, which is a treatment that affects the absorbency of the paper. The more alum (potassium aluminum sulfate) added in sizing, the less absorbent the paper becomes and the easier it is to control the ink. Artists who use a heavily ink-laden brush often favor absorbent paper to create moist, succulent effects in their paintings. For either paintings that emphasize a dry ink look or contrast dry and wet brushwork, heavily sized paper is suitable.

II. ACCESSORIES TO THE FOUR TREASURES

In addition to the Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio, a variety of accessories were common on the scholar's table: water droppers, inkstick stands, paperweights, brush rests, brush washers, wrist rests, inkstone stands, and carved name seals (also known as chops). These accessories were made of materials such as jade, ivory, porcelain, or bamboo, and they were often elaborately carved or painted. These beautifully crafted and

designed objects added to the aesthetic and creative atmosphere of the scholar's study.

Brush Rests

Whenever a calligrapher or painter changes brushes or pauses while working, the brush rest serves to temporarily hold the wet brush. The brush rest keeps the brush tip off the table and out of the artist's way.

Brush rests can be made from many materials and are carved in shapes ranging from fruits and flowers to dragons and reclining immortals. The most popular shape for a brush rest is a group of five mountain peaks, representing the five sacred mountains of China. The "valley" between the mountain peaks provides a convenient resting place for the brush. While precious materials (jade, coral, agate, crystal, rhinoceros horn, cloissone, porcelain) could be used to make mountain brush rests, many scholars preferred stone.

BRUSH REST

Name Seals

Carved name seals, also known as chops, have been used continuously in Chinese history, not only as personal seals and

to certify official documents, but also to sign a calligraphic work or a painting. The main purpose of a seal is to certify authorship or ownership, but they also had aesthetic appeal. Not just limited to a proper name, seals often give a nickname, such as "The Old Man of the Mountain" or "The Stone Cutter," or the name of a scholar's study such as "Luxuriant Flower Cottage." The sayings of a scholar could also be carved on a seal. One of Wang Yani's seals has a monkey carved on its bottom. An artist may use a brush to sign his or her name and perhaps write the date on the painting, and the artist will then typically affix a seal near the signature. It is not uncommon for collectors of paintings to also place their name seals on the works they own.

Certain craftsmen specialize in carving seals in soapstone, jade, bone, or sometimes wood. Some scholars became adept at carving their own seals. A scholar might have numerous seals to use at certain times, or different seals might be carved to mark significant changes in the scholar's life.

The red seal paste used with the seals is made of the mineral cinnabar and other ingredients. The paste is thick and sticky. To stamp the seal onto the paper, an artist first rubs the bottom of the seal against the seal paste until the seal is covered with red. Then the artist presses the seal onto the scroll paper and lifts gently. To make a clear impression, artists place something soft, like a folded handkerchief or a paperback book, under the paper they are stamping.

III. THE SISTER ARTS: CALLIGRAPHY, PAINTING, AND POETRY

When looking at a Chinese painting, the viewer enjoys not only the artist's technique and brushwork but also the calligraphy and poetic content of an inscription that might have been added. This was the ideal in Chinese literati painting--to combine the three interrelated arts of calligraphy, painting, and poetry.

Well-versed in the Chinese classics, the literati often composed poetry or verse that contained sophisticated historical or lyrical allusions. Even though they were well-grounded in the history and basics of Chinese calligraphy, they painted as amateurs. To them, painting was a form of self-expression, intended only to please themselves and their circle of like-minded friends. On the other hand, professional artists painted to please their patrons and to earn a living. Many of them were court painters who produced bird and flower pictures or scenes of grand palaces. While many professional painters were excellent artists, their works do not necessarily fuse the three arts of calligraphy, painting, and poetry.

In Reading in the Autumn, a work dating from the 1470s, the artist Shen Zhou portrayed himself in an autumnal landscape, seated and holding a book. In the upper left, several lines of calligraphy offer a poem composed and written by Shen Zhou. It reads,

The big trees exposed to the west wind are losing their
leaves.
To be comfortable I have unfastened the collar of my robe;
sitting here, I'm letting the time go by.
Doing nothing, I've turned my back on encroaching autumn
. . .
My spirit has gone wandering in the sky . . . Who can
fathom it?

(from Art Treasures of the Peking Museum)

The poem adds immeasurably to the mood of the painting and reveals Shen Zhou's state of mind when he painted this scene. Besides enjoying the visual and mental images of an autumnal landscape, the viewer can appreciate Shen Zhou's calligraphy. Such literati painting has long been held in high esteem by both Chinese and Western art connoisseurs.

Instead of composing a poem, an artist might include an inscription describing the mood that inspired a painting. If the artist showed a painting to a few close friends, they might add a line of verse or another poem either to indicate their friendship and appreciation or to commemorate the occasion.

Many particularly precious or well-known works of art have a great many inscriptions, as scholars and collectors who later owned the painting felt compelled to add their inscriptions and name seals. Seal impressions themselves became another art form enjoyed by the literati and art connoisseurs.

The following sources were used in compiling the information presented above and are recommended for further reading.

Jane Evans. Chinese Brush Painting. Watson-Guptill Publications, 1987.

Sherman E. Lee. The Colors of Ink. Asia Society, Inc., 1974.

Jerome Silbergeld. Chinese Painting Style. University of Washington Press, 1982.

Michael Sullivan. The Arts of China. University of California Press, 1973.

About Yani

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Wang Yani was born on May 2, 1975, in Gongcheng, a small rural town in Guangxi, a southern province of China. (In China, people give their family name first. Thus, Yani's family name is Wang and her given name is Yani.) Yani's father, Wang Shiqing, is an oil painter. When Yani was two, she began to accompany her father to his studio and watch him paint. He would let her play with his painting tools; at first, she made squiggles, dots, and lines that only she understood. When she was three, Yani started to paint recognizable images of animals using Chinese brushes. When her incredible abilities quickly became apparent, her father decided to give up his artistic career in order for Yani to develop her own style without being influenced by his work.

On visits to the zoo in a nearby town, Yani was entranced by all the animals. The monkeys especially intrigued her, because in her eyes, they played the way children do. She would stand for hours watching them and imitating their movements. Always a storyteller, she began to spin tales about monkeys. When walking with her father in the woods, Yani would pick up pieces of bark and rocks, pretend that they were monkeys, and then weave a story around them. Soon she began to paint monkeys, and they became her imaginary friends and playmates.

As she has grown older, Yani has explored a wide variety of subjects in her paintings. Now, she paints not only monkeys but also camels, egrets, and roosters. Her later animal paintings

display an increased sophistication in composition, including complex relationships between the painted forms and blank space which she uses as an active visual element in her work. She has also extended her subject matter to include flowers, landscapes and figures.

Although Yani does not sketch or plan her paintings in advance, each of her works portrays a story she has made up. She observes her surroundings and transforms what she sees and what she knows into her paintings. For instance, she might paint a wine bottle as a ceramic pot; or she might create a painting of a monkey engaged in a human activity such as fishing.

Yani paints quickly, even though she is not formally trained as a painter. Nevertheless, her lack of planning and her ability to splash ink drops across a sheet of paper to create a recognizable scene is characteristic of the established style of painting called "idea writing" (xieyi in Chinese).

In addition, Yani mostly paints with traditional Chinese materials: Chinese brushes, absorbent plant-fiber paper, color, and ink. She also uses traditional Chinese name seals. While her father has not influenced her choice of subject matter, he has guided her technique, particularly the way she holds the brush to make quick, bold strokes on the paper. Holding the brush firmly is extremely important. When Yani was learning to paint, her father would stand behind her and suddenly reach over her shoulder to try to grab her brush. If he was able to snatch it from her hand, she was not holding the brush firmly enough.

To date, Yani has exhibited her work throughout China as well as in West Germany, Great Britain, and Japan. The exhibition at the Sackler Gallery, Yani: The Brush of Innocence, is her first exhibition in Washington, D.C.

Introduction to Slides and Slide Packet

The enclosed slides and questions were selected to help you and your students explore Chinese painting. All but one of these slides show paintings by Wang Yani, a young Chinese artist. She painted these works between the ages of five and eleven years old, using Chinese brushes, ink, color, and paper. The first slide introduces the Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio: the brush, inkstick, inkstone, and paper.

We hope that the questions accompanying the slides will help your students to look carefully at the images and to think about why Wang Yani painted them. Also, we hope that your students will consider the techniques and materials of Chinese painting. These slides also complement the "Activities" section of this packet.

The slides and questions are arranged to aid your classroom presentation. **QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDENTS ARE GIVEN IN BOLD, UPPERCASE LETTERS**; information and answers for the teachers appear in lowercase letters and are intended for you to use with your students as you see fit.

Information for each slide is organized in the following manner.

1) **Title of painting**
2) **The age at which Yani created the painting.**
3) **Suggested questions to encourage class discussion.**

Slide 1

The Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio

The Four Treasures are the brush, inkstick, inkstone, and paper. Chinese calligraphers and painters feel that the tools they use for these arts are of such importance and artistic value that they should be called the Four Treasures.

To use the Four Treasures, a small amount of water is placed on one end of an extremely smooth inkstone. The inkstick, which is made of black pine soot mixed with glue made from such animal parts as deer horns or more commonly the hides of horses, oxen or donkeys, is then rubbed on the inkstone with the water until the desired consistency of ink is achieved. The brush--the chief tool of calligraphy and painting--is made of natural animal hair, such as rabbit fur or mongoose or wolf hair. Composed of layers of hair of different lengths, the brush tip tapers to a point. This versatile brush is then dipped in ink or color and applied to paper, which is usually made from plant fiber, such as mulberry bark, bamboo pulp, or sometimes cotton.

The amount of water used to prepare the ink determines the ink's consistency, and this, plus how much additional water the artist may add by dipping the brush in water, determines how dark or light the ink will look on the paper. Sometimes the artist even mixes ink with water in a bowl to produce an especially diluted ink solution. Also, the amount of ink on the brush

determines the brushtrokes' appearance when applied to paper. A brush saturated with ink tends to produce a heavier effect. As the ink on the brush dries, however, the brushstrokes begin to look scratchy. Sometimes, artists use a dry stroke to create special textures in their paintings. Look for these variations in the paintings in the following slides.

(Note: There is a further discussion of the Four Treasures in the activity section of this packet. You might wish to show this slide in preparation for the appropriate activities.)

Slide 2

<u>This is For Mommy</u>

Wang Yani, age 5

WHAT ANIMALS ARE IN THIS PAINTING?

WHAT ARE THESE MONKEYS DOING?

MAKE UP A STORY FOR THIS PAINTING.

Yani gives human emotions to her monkeys. Here, a baby monkey kneels on the back of its mother and offers her a piece of fruit. Yani uses few brushstrokes as she works quickly to give form to her monkeys. The deep black tone of the monkeys' legs indicates that Yani used a wet brush full of dark ink. In contrast, the rather wispy brushstrokes on both monkeys' stomachs show the use of a drier brush. Touches of red emphasize the monkeys' muzzles, while the fruit, which somewhat resembles the shape of the mother monkey's nose, draws attention to her crouched figure.

Slide 3

Hurry Home

Wang Yani, age 6

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS PAINTING IS CALLED HURRY HOME?

WHAT IS THE MONKEY RIDING?

MAKE UP A STORY ABOUT THIS PAINTING.

In Hurry Home, Yani expands her monkey world to include other animals and to bring her monkeys new friends. Compare the camel with the monkey; Yani used a lot of water to produce a light concentration of the pinkish color for the camel, giving it a soft, almost wispy appearance. She used less water and a heavier concentration of color (mostly black ink) when she painted the monkey. On close inspection, brushstrokes are visible on the camel's side and humps. Yani puddled small dots of heavy black ink to create the camel's hooves. The camel's legs are very long and thin, and the deep black of the hooves contrasts with the light color of the legs. The hooves are almost like the dot at the bottom of an exclamation point (!) and they draw the viewer's eye down the length of the legs, which look as spindly as the legs of a real camel.

Slide 4

Last Night I Dreamt I Saw the Racing Egrets

Wang Yani, age 11

HOW CAN YOU TELL THAT THESE EGRETS ARE RACING?

HOW MANY EGRET BEAKS DO YOU SEE IN THIS PAINTING?

HOW MANY LEGS?

ARE THERE ENOUGH LEGS FOR THE NUMBER OF BEAKS YOU SEE?

HOW MANY SHADES OF BLACK DO YOU SEE IN THIS PAINTING?

Yani creates a feeling of movement in this painting by silhouetting the forms of twenty-nine egrets and overlapping them in an asymmetrical design. Even though Yani used few brushstrokes, she clearly delineated each egret, assigning each a distinct posture and personality. The concentration of egrets in the upper right corner contrasts with the empty area to the lower left, thus creating a sense of spaciousness that seems to extend beyond the confines of the painting itself. Yani conveys movement not through the birds' legs, but through the rhythmic pattern of sharp beaks and curving necks that all point emphatically to the left.

Slide 5

<u>The Lotus Flowers Are So Pretty</u>

Wang Yani, age 10

ARE THESE ALL THE SAME FLOWER?

WHAT COLORS DO YOU SEE IN THIS PAINTING?

The lotus pond in Yani's front yard has given her many opportunities to paint the lotus at various stages in its yearly cycle. In this painting, she has captured the lotus seed pod, the full-grown flower, and the decaying lotus bloom. The effect of cutting off the stems at the bottom of the paper is that the stems continue beyond the paper and are rooted in water. By mixing color and ink on the same brush or by layering combinations of color and ink, Yani creates many shades of blue, green, red, and black.

Slide 6

A Sunny Day

Wang Yani, age 11

WHAT COLOR IS THE SKY IN THIS PAINTING?

WHAT COLOR ARE THE MOUNTAINS?

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS PAINTING IS CALLED A SUNNY DAY?

ARE THERE ANY PEOPLE, OR HINTS OF PEOPLE IN THIS PAINTING?

MAKE UP A STORY ABOUT THIS PAINTING.

The Li River and its mountains, which rise straight out of the water, have been a popular theme for many Chinese painters. Yani's small town is not far from the river, so her landscapes portray not only a common theme in Chinese painting but also a location that is familiar to her. Yani portrays depth through the diagonal thrust of the mountain peaks. When the viewer's eye naturally follows this diagonal, the mind reads the mountains at the top of the painting as if they were farthest away. By painting the mountains a deep, clear blue color, she adds a sense of sun and light to the scene. As in many Chinese landscape paintings, evidence of people is clearly but subtly offered. Notice the outlined houses scattered throughout the mountains and the boats floating beneath them. The boats and flashes of blue also carry the viewer's eye through the composition and into the distance, much like the diagonal thrust of the peaks.

Activities for Students

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVITIES

This packet is designed for teachers of students who range in age from five through eleven years. The classroom activities in this packet consist of two sections: The Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio and Painting and Poetry. These activities, which are intended to complement the exhibition Yani: The Brush of Innocence, may be worked on either before or after a visit to the Sackler Gallery, or they may be undertaken independent of a visit to the museum. For example, a teacher may wish to prepare a class for a museum visit by introducing the traditional Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio: brush, inkstick, inkstone, and paper. Post-museum visit activities might include having students complete the Four Treasures activity sheet or undertake an activity in the section on Painting and Poetry.

Questions are posed throughout this section. These questions are to help students review information and to elicit discussion. In order to have fuller discussions, teachers may wish to look at "Background Information for Teachers," which gives additional information on the Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio and on Chinese painting. This packet is designed for those who cannot yet read and for those who can. For teachers of students who are reading, the sheets in this section may be copied and handed out to the students.

These materials allow teachers to select the activities that best suit their students' age group and their class curricular goals. For younger students, the information may be presented orally by the teacher; older students are encouraged to work on the activity sheets on their own.

THE FOUR TREASURES: BRUSH - INKSTICK - INKSTONE - PAPER

The Chinese refer to the brush, inkstick, inkstone, and paper as the Four Treasures of a Scholar's Studio. These materials are associated with the Chinese scholar who was expected to be skilled in the arts of painting, calligraphy (the art of beautiful writing), and poetry. While associated with an artistic tradition, the brush was also used as the primary writing tool in China until the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, pencils, ball-point pens, and fountain pens have also been employed. Yet the brush is still used for special occasions and its association with artistic skill remains.

WHY DO YOU THINK THE CHINESE CALLED THESE THE FOUR TREASURES OF A SCHOLAR'S STUDIO?

(Traditionally, those who were most revered in China were the scholars. A mark of a scholar was mastery of calligraphy, painting, and poetry. For these, the brush, inkstick, inkstone, and paper were necessary.)

BRUSH

The Chinese brush is used for both writing and painting. Unlike brushes we use, its tip is layered with varying lengths of animal hair and tapers to a sharp point. The animal hair that makes up the tip protrudes from a hollow bamboo handle. Hair for Chinese brushes can come from different animals, such as goat, rabbit, sheep, deer, weasel, or badger. The coarseness or softness of a brush helps determine how the ink or color looks on the paper. In addition, the size of the brush determines the kind of brushstroke that can be made.

WHAT KIND OF ANIMAL HAIR WOULD MAKE A SOFT BRUSH?

WHAT KIND OF ANIMAL HAIR WOULD MAKE A COARSE BRUSH?

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO USE BRUSHES OF DIFFERENT SIZES WHEN YOU PAINT?

INKSTICK and INKSTONE

When you need a bottle of ink for an art project, you buy it at an art supply store. Chinese artists traditionally paint with ink made from pine soot, which has been mixed and hardened with glue and formed into a solid stick. These inksticks are often decorated with colored pictures or Chinese writing in gold. Today, Chinese also use bottled ink in addition to inksticks.

The inkstone is a small slab of stone with a flat, raised area on one end and a slope or well on the other. To make liquid ink, you rub the inkstick in water on the flat part of the inkstone. Before bottled liquid ink was available, all artists had to make their own ink. Many painters and calligraphers still prepare their own ink; they feel that grinding the ink helps them to focus their thoughts and to loosen their wrist and arm in preparation for calligraphy or painting.

THINK OF AN ACTIVITY YOU LIKE TO DO, PERHAPS PLAYING BASKETBALL OR SOCCER, PLAYING MUSIC, OR DRAWING A PICTURE. DO YOU DO ANYTHING TO 1) WARM UP OR EXERCISE YOUR MUSCLES, 2) HELP YOU TO CONCENTRATE FOR THE ACTIVITY?

PAPER

Chinese paper is made of dried plant-fiber pulp; the most common plant fibers are mulberry reeds, hemp, bamboo, grass, and cotton. Plant-fiber paper is extremely absorbent. Once ink is placed on the paper, there is no way to erase it. Take out the paper samples that came with this packet.

WHAT DO YOU THINK PLANT-FIBER PAPER FEELS LIKE? IS IT SOFT, GENTLE, ROUGH, OR SCRATCHY?

IN CHINESE PAINTING, A BRUSHSTROKE MAY NOT BE DELETED (ONE CAN, HOWEVER, LAYER BRUSHSTROKES TO PRODUCE A PARTICULAR TEXTURE). ONCE A STROKE IS MADE IT CANNOT BE CHANGED. THEREFORE, IF A MISTAKE IS MADE, HOW MIGHT A PAINTER OR CALLIGRAPHER FIX IT?

(The calligrapher or painter might 1) incorporate the mistake into the picture and change the original design, 2) leave it as it is, or 3) start over again.)

Rubbing Ink

Provide students with inksticks and inkstones. With a spoon or a water dropper, put a small amount of water (1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon) on the inkstones. Instruct the students to grasp the inksticks in an upright position between their thumb and first two fingers, and place the end of the inkstick on the stone. If they wish they may rest an elbow on the table, but they must keep their wrist off of it. While holding the inkstick very firmly, they should move it in a clockwise motion through the water. After three to five minutes of constant grinding, the ink will begin to look thick and bubbly. The longer the students rub the inkstick, the thicker and blacker the ink will become. Remember: Do not leave the wet end of the inkstick resting on the inkstone. The glue in the inkstick has strong binding powers, and attempts to remove the dried inkstick could actually damage the stone.

Questions for discussion:

ALTHOUGH GRINDING YOUR OWN INK TAKES TIME AND PATIENCE, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS?

(You get the exact shade of ink you want; you relax and get in the mood to paint; you start to concentrate and think about what to paint; you exercise and loosen up your wrist and arm for painting; you learn to appreciate the quality of the inkstick because of the work involved.)

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU DO TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR STARTING AN ART PROJECT?

(Perhaps you doodle, reflect about what you will paint, select and organize your art materials or mix your paints.)

Painting with Brushes

Provide students with brushes of different sizes and types, such as ones with resilient, soft, or coarse hairs. If possible, find out what type of hairs are used in the brushes (an art supply store should be able to tell you).

Show the students how to care for the brushes. The tip of a new brush is encased in a plastic protective cap. After discarding the cap, immerse two-thirds of the brush tip in hot water to remove the sizing. Once you have soaked and used a new brush, never recap it or you will break and bend the hairs that are at the tip of the brush. Brushes should always be cleaned in water after use and if possible, hung downward to dry. Some brushes come with a loop at the top of the brush so they can be hung downward to dry.

Set out an assortment of paper and different sizes/types of brushes. Let the students experiment with the brushes using ink and paper. You might want the students to wear smocks.

Questions for discussion:

WHY MIGHT DIFFERENT SIZES OF PAPER REQUIRE DIFFERENT BRUSHES?

(A smaller piece of paper might be used for a painting with a great deal of detail. A small brush that paints a thin line is necessary for detail. To fill a large piece of paper, to paint large areas, or to make a wide stroke, a big brush is needed.)

WHAT SIZE BRUSH WOULD A PAINTER USE FOR A BIG PAINTING? FOR SMALL DETAILS?

(A painter would probably use many sizes of brushes for a big painting. A painter would use a big brush for large images and a small brush for details.)

DO PAINTERS USE ONLY ONE BRUSH TO PAINT OR SEVERAL BRUSHES?

(Painters usually use many brushes to paint with. Chinese brushes are different sizes and are made of different kinds of animal hairs so a painter can create a painting with different textures. Painters use soft rabbit-hair brushes for ink and color washes and weasel or wolf-hair resilient brushes for lines.)

Writing with a Chinese Brush

In elementary school, Chinese students learn how to hold and use a Chinese brush. The Chinese do not use the letters of any alphabet, instead they use symbols called characters. They spend many hours memorizing the characters with which the Chinese language is written, and they practice writing words with a Chinese brush. Once students have mastered the techniques of holding and using a Chinese brush, they can apply the same techniques to paint with ink and brush.

To use a Chinese brush:

1) Hold the brush upright (tip downward), with your thumb and forefinger grasping the handle toward the top.

2) Further down the handle firmly press the brush between the top joints of your middle and ring fingers.

3) Rest your little finger against the handle.

Some Chinese artists say that if you can fit an egg inside the palm of your hand while holding the brush, you are holding it correctly.

Playing with Ink and Paper

Provide students with brushes and several dishes of ink of different consistencies. (Add more water to make lighter colors.) Use purchased plant-fiber paper or paper towels, newspaper, brown paper bags, etc., so students can experiment with the inks' tonal variation and the absorbency of different kinds of paper. Let them experiment with ink and paper. You may want them to wear smocks during this exercise.

Questions for discussion:

Show the students slides of Chinese paintings or the slides of paintings by Yani contained in this packet.

WHAT COLORS DO YOU SEE IN THESE PAINTINGS?

WHAT MAIN COLOR APPEARS OVER AND OVER AGAIN?

HOW MANY SHADES OF BLACK CAN YOU COUNT?

(While Chinese artists use many colors, black and shades of black from the inkstick are the most common colors in Chinese painting.)

HOW DOES THE ARTIST CREATE A LIGHTER SHADE OF BLACK?

(A lighter shade of black is created when more water is mixed with the ink. The more water used in relation to the ink, the lighter the shade of black.)

HOW IS SKY OR WATER SHOWN?

(The sky is often shown by blank, unpainted space or by clouds. Water is often suggested by wavy lines or by blank space; sometimes an artist will indicate water with a light wash or with a few painted boats.)

DO LEAVES, BAMBOO OR GRASS THAT ARE PAINTED MORE DARKLY SEEM CLOSER OR FARTHER AWAY IN THE PICTURES?

(The dark and light shadings of the ink help to give perspective to paintings. Objects that are darker appear father away.)

DOES THE KIND OF PAPER USED MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN HOW THE INK LOOKS ON THE PAPER?

(The degree of absorbency in the paper affects how the ink looks. Paper that is absorbent will cause the ink to look softer and less crisp.)

Student's Four Treasures

Using the spaces below, students can write about an imaginary Four Treasures box. Or they can bring in boxes for their Four Treasures after they have completed the following exercise.

WRITE YOUR NAME ON THE TOP OF YOUR OWN FOUR TREASURES BOX OR AT THE TOP OF THE EXERCISE BELOW.

WHAT FOUR TREASURES WOULD YOU PUT IN YOUR BOX FOR PAINTING AND DRAWING?

WRITE THE NAMES OF YOUR TREASURES ON THE LINES BELOW. THEN DRAW A PICTURE OF EACH TREASURE.

TELL THE CLASS WHY THESE ARE YOUR FOUR TREASURES.

PAINTING AND POETRY - CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

There are three major genres (or styles) of Chinese paintings--bird and flower paintings (which include paintings of animals), landscape paintings, and figure paintings. Wang Yani began painting animals, and as she has grown older, she has explored other bird and flower subjects as well as landscape paintings and figure paintings. We hope you, too, will explore the different genres in Chinese painting.

Mountains in Chinese Painting

The Chinese word for landscape is made up of the two characters for "mountain" and "water." Mountains and water commonly appear together in Chinese landscape paintings. The mountains may be gentle rolling hills or tall craggy peaks; the water may be a lake, a stream, a babbling brook, or a waterfall.

Chinese scholars, officials, and painters have always enjoyed looking at landscape paintings. It has been said that a great Chinese landscape painting can take us out of ourselves.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO SAY THAT A PAINTING CAN TAKE US OUT OF OURSELVES?

IS THERE SOMETHING IN NATURE OR SOME PLACE THAT GIVES YOU A SPECIAL FEELING? A RESTFUL FEELING? WHAT IS IT?

To learn the special features of mountains, clouds, and mist, and the different types of trees and rocks, artists sometimes journey into the mountains to enjoy and observe nature closely. Later they create landscape paintings from both their memory and their imagination.

HAVE YOU GONE TO THE MOUNTAINS? WHAT DID YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT THEM?

IF YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN TO THE MOUNTAINS, USE YOUR IMAGINATION! WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD BE MOST WONDERFUL? WRITE DOWN ALL THE THINGS YOU IMAGINE YOU WOULD SEE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Making a clay mountain brush rest

Chinese artists use the brush, one of the Four Treasures of a Chinese Scholar's Studio, for calligraphy and painting. When artists are not using a brush, they place it on the table or on a brush rest.

The brush rest is often in the shape of a mountain range and has two or more peaks. The brush is then placed in the "valley" or space between the mountain peaks.

A brush rest can be made of bamboo, stone, porcelain, or other materials. You can make one out of clay.

Materials

Self-hardening modeling clay (such as marble or Mexican pottery clay) and water-based paints.

Instructions

Model a piece of clay into the shape of at least two connecting mountains.

Make a space between each mountain top for your brush by placing your finger or a round pen or tube between the mountain peaks. Depending on the diameter of the writing implement you are using, you must carefully judge how wide the "valley" between the peaks will be.

Let your brush stand dry 2 to 3 days.

Now paint it with water-based paints. After your first coat of paint dries, you can add designs in different colors.

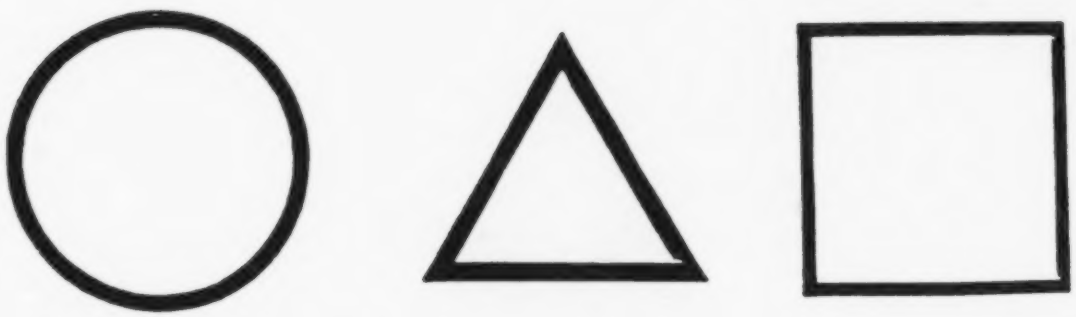
Optional: To waterproof your brush rest, paint it with acrylic paint or use acrylic spray.

Now you have a mountain brush rest for your favorite pencil, magic marker, or brush!

Making your personal seal

In China, artists stamp their names on their paintings with a seal, which is also sometimes called a chop. The artist's name is carved into the bottom of a small block. The seal is then pressed into a special red ink-paste and stamped onto the painting.

Seals come in many different sizes and shapes. Below are three shapes. Make a special design of your name inside one of the shapes. Then try all three!



Creating your own picture/poem

It is common for a poem or even a story to be written on a Chinese painting. Sometimes artists both compose and transcribe the poems themselves. For other paintings, they might transcribe an ancient poem or ask a friend to write a poem on the painting. Often the words of a poem will remind the viewer of a place, an animal, a flower or bird, or a special time. Sometimes a poem and a picture are conceived at the same time. When this happens, the artist composes a picture that included both the poem and the picture.

ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR FAVORITE ANIMAL, PLACE, OR PERSON. THEN WRITE A SHORT POEM ON YOUR PICTURE. YOU MIGHT WANT TO USE THE PENCIL, PEN, OR BRUSH THAT IS PLACED ON YOUR MOUNTAIN BRUSH REST. WHERE YOU PUT THE WORDS IN THE PICTURE IS YOUR OWN CHOICE!

(The poetry can be written horizontally or vertically, and it can be placed at the bottom, along the top, or in the middle of the picture.)

Additional classroom activity - a handscroll

Divide the class into two or more groups. Some students will create a painting and others will write poetry about it. You may wish to compile a list of the students' comments about mountains and make a master list of the descriptive words used, so both painters and poets can refer to it later.

Begin by unrolling the paper for the handscroll. Chinese handscrolls are usually about fourteen inches wide. A typical length for a handscroll that combines poetry with images can be as short as three feet or as long as eight feet. Your handscroll can be as short or long as you wish. When looking at a handscroll, the Chinese roll it out from right to left about a foot at a time. A handscroll may show a series of changes in space (such as driving away from the city and into the mountains) or time (the sun setting or the moon rising in the sky).

Have different groups of students paint their images a section at a time. Like Wang Yani, they may combine animals with flowers and plants; they may wish to add mountains and houses. If the students wish to title the handscroll, write the title at the beginning of the handscroll or leave enough room to add it at the end.

After the handscroll is completed, the second group can then compose poetry about the finished painting. They can decide where their poetry should be placed: either on the blank spaces on the upper portion of the actual landscape or in the space following the completed handscroll.

If possible, bring in several Chinese seals and red ink-paste. Let the students stamp the seals onto the handscroll, or they can draw their personal seal design from "Making your personal seal."

Discussion Topics:

Before beginning the project, briefly talk about the format of the Chinese handscroll. Discuss with the students what they would like to include in their painting.

After the painting is completed, discuss the students' feelings and thoughts about the handscroll to generate ideas for the student poets to write their poetry. You might also want to read some Chinese poetry to the students or poetry by western poets.

*** While the Handscroll Class Project was designed to complement the activity sheets in the Painting and Poetry sections in this teacher's packet, its general concept and instructions could be adapted to other themes the class might wish to pursue. For example, the class could create a handscroll of A Class Visit to the Zoo, A Trip to a Museum, or Views of the Great Wall of China.

Supply Sources for Chinese Painting Materials

The following stores carry artists materials and supplies for Chinese brush painting.

MARYLAND

Koenig Art Emporium
Lakeforest Mall
Gaithersburg, MD
948-0317

Macco of Bethesda
8311 Wisconsin Avenue
Lower Level Suite A-1
Bethesda, MD
656-7749

Lipman's Art & Frame Shop
8209 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD
587-5581

Visual Systems Company, Inc.
1596 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD
770-0500
With a $10 minimum purchase on non-sale items, this store offers a 20% student discount. For orders over $25, it will provide free delivery throughout the metropolitan Washington area.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Abstract Inc.

3309 12th Street, NE

Near Brookland Metro

Washington, D.C.

526-8860

With a $20 minimum purchase, this store will give a 10% student discount and free delivery service.

Chinese Culture & Arts Co.

736 7th Street, NW

Washington, D.C.

783-1388

Visual Systems Company, Inc.

1727 Eye Street, NW

Washington, D.C.

331-7090

With a $10 minimum purchase on non-sale items, this store offers a 20% student discount. For orders over $25 it will provide free delivery throughout the metropolitan Washington area, but arrangements for this delivery service must be arranged through the Rockville branch store.

VIRGINIA

J. F. Thomas Co.

5825 Leesburg Pike

Bailey's Cross Roads, VA 22041

(Bailey's shopping center - route 7 & Columbia Pike)

820-9590

Offers a 10% discount to teachers.

Koenig Art Emporium

4238 Wilson Boulevard

Arlington, VA

243-8778

Affordable Art Supplies & Frames

8847 Richmond Highway

Alexandria, VA

780-5551

Has a limited range of supplies.

The Colorwheel

Langley Shopping Center

1374 Chain Bridge Road

McLean, VA

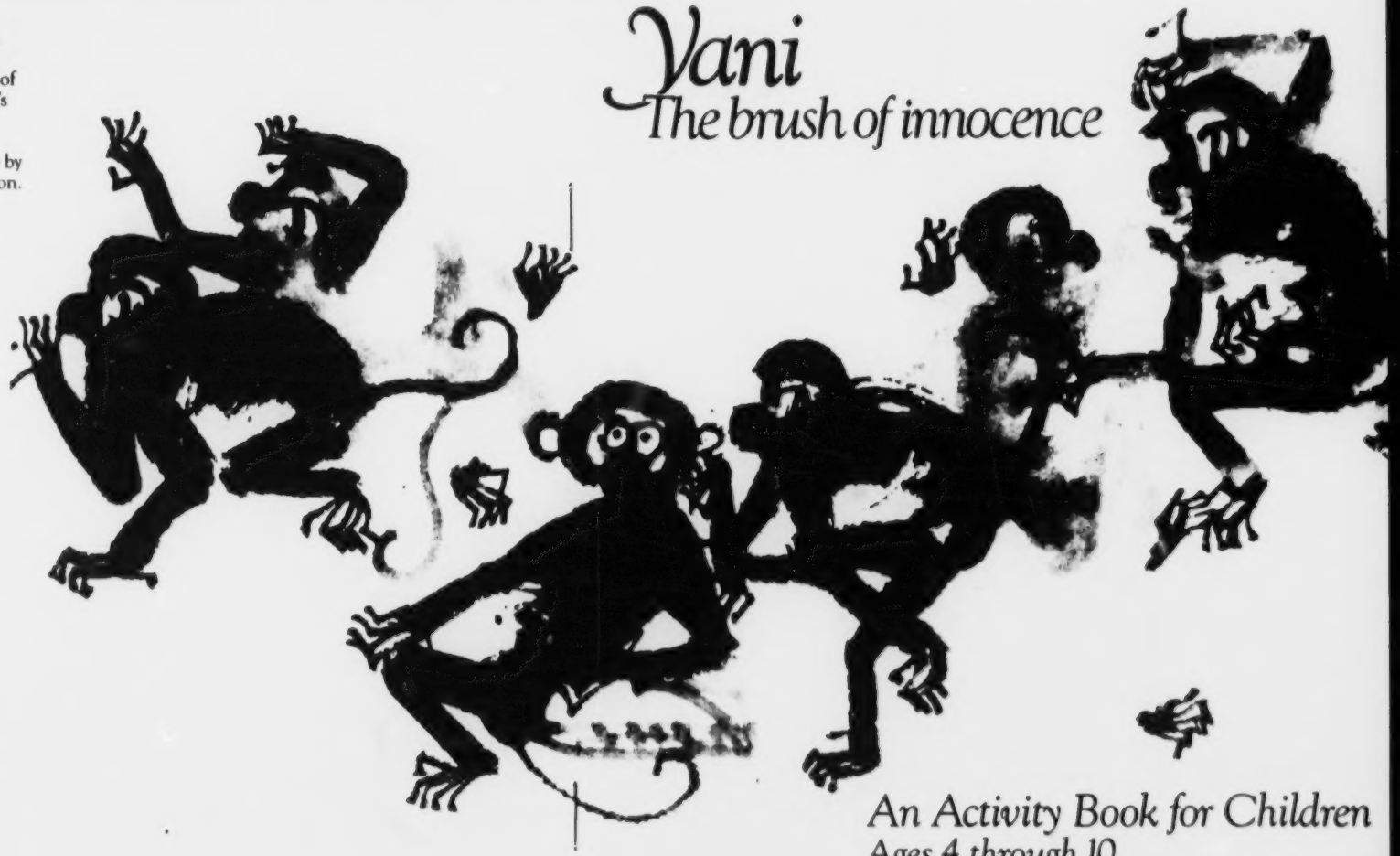
356-8477

Has a limited range of supplies.

Yani: The Brush of Innocence is organized by the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, with the sponsorship of the Ministry of Culture, People's Republic of China.

The exhibition is made possible by United Technologies Corporation.

Yani
The brush of innocence



An Activity Book for Children
Ages 4 through 10

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
Smithsonian Institution

June 25–October 22, 1989

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On the cover and inside
Detail from *A Hundred Monkeys*

How old were you when you drew your first picture?

Yani at age 3 (1978)

In this exhibition you will look at paintings by Wang Yani, a young Chinese girl who painted her first picture when she was two years old and who still loves to paint. Wang Yani is especially fond of monkeys!

Use this booklet in the museum to look at paintings of Wang Yani's three favorite subjects: monkeys, flowers, and landscapes.

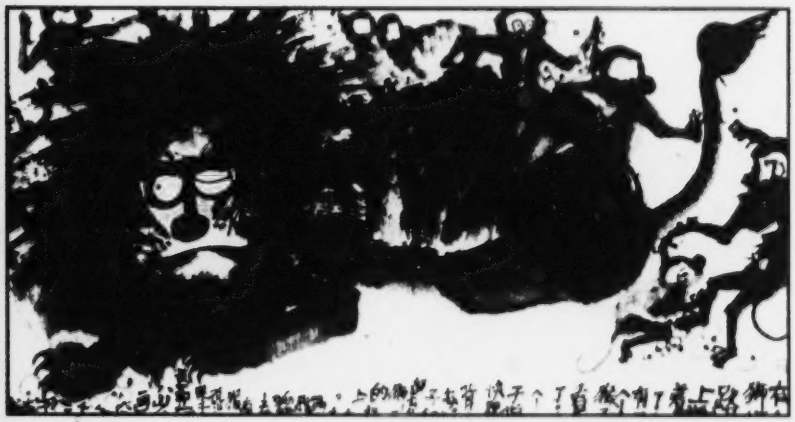
Take this booklet with you when you leave. It will introduce you to Wang Yani, where she lives, and how she began to paint. The activities in the back will allow you to join Wang Yani in using your own imagination.

Yani's Monkeys

Have you seen monkeys in the zoo?

What do you know about monkeys?

In the first room of the exhibition look at *The Lion Is Awake!*



The Lion Is Awake!

What are the monkeys doing to the lion?

Do you think monkeys and lions play together in the jungle?

Yani wrote a story at the bottom of her painting.
Chinese artists often do this.
What would you write about this painting?
Yani's story is at the bottom of this page.

Look at *Handing Out Fruit for Mommy.*
Are the monkeys acting like children or like monkeys? Explain.

As you go through this exhibition, look for the monkeys. Make sure you read the titles—they often give clues about what Yani thinks is happening in the painting.

A lion is sleeping in the road. Several little monkeys saw it. One said: "Let's climb on its back." All the monkeys climbed up except for two which were too scared to do so. One said: "Let's throw some fruit up there."

Yani's Flowers

In the second room, look at *The Lotus Flowers Are So Pretty!* and *Oh! It Smells So Good!*

How does Yani show that the lotus is pretty?

How does Yani try to show that the lotus smells good?

Yani is particularly fond of the lotus plant. The lotus grows in water and has a tall stem. Its blossom has big cupped leaves and a sweet smell. In China, the lotus is a symbol of purity and is considered quite special. There is a lotus pond in front of Yani's house.

Oh! It Smells So Good!

Now you have seen two subjects that Yani often paints: monkeys and flowers.

Find a painting in which she includes both. What is the title of the painting you have chosen?

What do you think is happening in the painting?

In China, artists stamp their names on their paintings with a seal, also called a "chop." The seal is usually a small stone block, which the artist presses into a special red ink-paste and stamps onto the painting. This is Yani's seal from *Pretty Riverbanks*— the Chinese writing says "WangYani stamped this."

Look for Yani's seal on her paintings.

Yani's Landscapes

A landscape is a painting of a scene from nature. In the third room, look at *A Sunny Day.*

How can you tell it is sunny?

Now look at *Autumn in a Hamlet.*

How can you tell it is autumn?

When painting landscapes, Yani is not interested in copying exactly what she sees. Instead, she remembers views that she has seen, and then she paints both from memory and with her imagination.

Pretty Riverbanks

In the fourth room, look at *Pretty Riverbanks.*

What seems to be rising out of the river?

Yani's hometown, Gongcheng, is on the Li River near the city of Guilin. The Li River is known for its beauty and for the mountains that stick up out of the water.

About Yani

Wang Yani was born on May 2, 1975, in Gongcheng, a small rural town in the Guangxi Province of China. Wang Yani began to paint when she was two years old. Her first pictures were lines, dots, and circles, and only Yani knew exactly what they meant. But by the time she was three she was painting pictures of animals that everyone recognized.

In China, people write their last name before their first name. Yani's family name is Wang and her first name is Yani. Yani's father, Wang Shiqiang, is also an artist.

Yani at age 12 (1988)

The countryside around Yani's house is filled with orchards, rice fields, and hills with tall pine trees. Coconut and bamboo trees grow in the area, and the Li River runs through Yani's village. Yani has always enjoyed taking long walks with her father and making up stories about what she sees. Once she told her father that the bright clouds at sunset were flames from the fire that helped the sun cook its meals. On these walks, Yani would also gather twigs and bits of bark, pretending these scraps were dragons, dogs, and chickens. Soon Yani was telling stories with her paintings. Many of Yani's first paintings were of monkeys. When she was three years old, Yani visited the zoo. She returned often and spent hours watching and imitating the monkeys—when they screeched, she screeched, when they chased each other, she ran back and forth.

In Yani's paintings, monkeys often display human feelings and personalities—Yani used to tell people that the monkeys in her paintings were her friends and playmates. Yani's father bought her a real monkey as a pet, but Yani lost interest in her pet.

The real monkey did not play the trumpet or help pick fruit or tell stories, like the monkeys she painted. Yani had created a world of monkeys in her imagination.

At first Yani painted plants only to provide food and shelter for her monkeys. She would not even paint leaves on the trees because leaves were of no use to her monkeys. But as she grew older, Yani began to paint plants by themselves as well as landscapes of the countryside around her home.

Yani uses traditional Chinese materials for her paintings. The ink, watercolors, and brushes she paints with are all slightly different from what you might use. For example, Chinese brushes have hollow bamboo handles, the brush tips are layered with varying lengths of animal hair, and they come to a sharp point. Yani paints on plant-fiber paper, which is very absorbent. In the Chinese tradition, she often writes on her paintings the title, her name, her age, and the date that she painted the picture.

Now you are acquainted with Wang Yani. If you had the chance to ask her a question, what would you ask?

On the following pages are activities for you to work on at home.

Is there an animal you like to imitate?

What animal do you especially enjoy watching or drawing?

What do you like about this animal?

Performing Acrobatics

Draw an animal doing something that is natural for it to do. Give your picture a title. You may want to write the title or sign your name on your picture.

74

12

Now draw your animal doing something a person might do. Give your picture a title.

75

13

In the exhibition you looked at lotus flowers. Yani tried to capture the lotus's beauty and scent. Look at page 4, where *Oh! It Smells So Good!* is illustrated.

Think about a flower you like, or make one up. What color is your flower?

Draw a picture of your flower. Give your picture a title.

Draw a picture that tries to capture the way your flower smells. Give your picture a title—maybe your title will help describe the flower's scent.

When Yani painted landscapes, she painted scenes that were familiar to her, and she painted them in different seasons. Look at page 7, where *Pretty Riverbanks* is illustrated.

Think of a place outdoors that you enjoy. Draw a picture of this place during a particular season, and give your picture a title.

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Draw a picture combining your favorite animal, your favorite flower, and your favorite place. Give your picture a title.

79

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YANI: THE BRUSH OF INNOCENCE

TEACHER'S PACKET

EVALUATION

We are eager to have your evaluation of the teacher's packet for Yani: The Brush of Innocence, so that we may improve future packets. Would you please fill in this evaluation form and return it to "Education Department, Yani Evaluation" at the above address. Many of the questions are to be answered by circling a number from 1 to 5. 1 is the lowest rating and 5 is the highest. Please circle the number that best reflects your opinion. Additional comments are welcome at the end of the evaluation.

Rate the usefulness of the Background Information for Teachers in introducing basic information about the tools used in Chinese painting.

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

Rate the usefulness of the slides and questions presented in the Slide Packet for helping students learn to look at Chinese painting.

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

Did you find the section of Classroom Activities to have

too many activities

the right number of activities

not enough activities

Did you find the Classroom Activities gave you flexibility in choosing appropriate activities for your students' grade level?

(not enough) 1 2 3 4 5 (enough)

Rate the usefulness of the section About Yani.

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

TELEPHONE (202) 357-4880

What would you like to see added to this packet?

Are there specific materials you would recommend to us that could be included in this packet?

Overall, how would you rate the packet for teachers?

excellent good fair poor

Additional comments:

THANK YOU!